



NEWS RELEASE

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California Department of Consumer Affairs Join Allies to Target Identity Theft for National Consumer Protection Week

'United Front' Aims to Help Californians Avoid 'Identity Theft: When Fact Becomes Fiction'

California Department of Consumer Affairs Director Charlene Zettel is spearheading a weeklong assault on identity theft to highlight National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW), Feb., 6-12, 2005. Zettel will be traveling the state, meeting with law enforcement officials and consumer advocates to discuss, among other things, the growing crime of identity theft.

This year's consumer-week theme, "Identity Theft: When Fact Becomes Fiction," focuses on minimizing the risk of identity theft and taking fast action to contain any harm, if an identity thief strikes.

"Our Office of Privacy Protection is a valuable resource for Californians who want to defend themselves against identity theft," said Zettel. "We want to help consumers guard their personal information like valuable property, lock it up and keep it safe."

During National Consumer Protection Week, California is teaming up with federal, state and local agencies and national advocacy organizations in a "united front" against identity thieves. Their goal is to help consumers of all ages understand how identity theft happens, the signs to look for, how to reduce the chances of becoming a victim, and how to get help if their personal information is compromised and used to open new accounts.

To further carry on the fight against identity thieves, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, the California State and Consumer Services Agency, the Department of Consumer Affairs, and its Office of Privacy Protection will present the first California "Summit on Identity Theft Solutions" on March 1 in Sacramento.

For National Consumer Protection Week, the department announced a new "Top 10 Tips for Identity Theft Prevention" consumer guide.

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“We’ve tried to distill the state of the art in identity theft protection down to 10 simple steps,” said Director Zettel. “Consumers can help minimize their risk of identity theft by keeping track of their credit, safeguarding their wallet, and putting strong passwords on bank, credit card and phone accounts.”

Highlights of the “Top 10 Tips for Identity Theft Prevention” are:

1. Protect your Social Security number

Ask your companies to use another number as your customer number, and don’t carry your Social Security card in your wallet.

2. Fight “phishing” – don’t take the bait

Don’t give out account numbers, passwords or other personal information unless you initiated the contact.

3. Keep your identity from getting trashed

Shred papers with personal information before discarding them.

4. Control your personal financial information

Write your bank and other financial services companies and tell them you want to “opt-out” of sharing personal financial information.

5. Shield your computer from viruses and spies

Use tough-to-crack passwords, frequently updated virus protection, spyware protection and a firewall.

6. Click with caution

Shop at trustworthy Web sites and only enter information on secure pages with “https” in the address and a padlock symbol at the bottom of the window.

7. Check your bills and bank statements

Check credit card bills and bank statements quickly for any unauthorized charges or withdrawals and report them immediately.

8. Stop pre-approved credit offers

Call 888-5OPTOUT (888-567-8688) toll-free to stop most pre-approved credit offers.

9. Ask questions

Ask how your personal information will be used, shared and protected before providing it.

10. Check your credit reports – for free

Request one free credit report annually from national credit bureaus.

Visit the Office of Privacy Protection Web site at www.privacy.ca.gov for more details on the “Top 10 Tips for Identity Theft Prevention” and other resources to help foil identity thieves. See the National Consumer Protection Week Web site at www.consumer.gov/ncpw for additional resources.

Joining the California Department of Consumer Affairs and the Office of Privacy Protection in the united front against identity theft are agencies and organizations that include: California High Tech Crimes Task Force members; Consumer Action; Consumers Union; local district attorneys; local law enforcement; Federal Trade Commission; Identity Theft Resource Center; Los Angeles County Department of Consumer Affairs; Privacy Rights Clearinghouse; and U.S. Postal Service.

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